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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Chapter I
Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141. It focuses on the activities of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) since the submission of the report to the sixty-second session of the General Assembly,[1] as well as on the institution-building phase of the Human Rights Council and treaty body reform. The report should be read in the context of the High Commissioner's report submitted earlier this year to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/7/38).

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-second Session, Supplement No. 36* (A/62/36).

Chapter II
Human Rights Council and universal periodic review

2. With the adoption of the institution-building package on 18 June 2007, the focus of the Council has progressively shifted from modelling its institutional architecture and adjusting the functioning of its mechanisms to the actual implementation of international norms, especially at the national level.

3. The launch of the universal periodic review with the full support of OHCHR constituted a major achievement of the Council in ensuring the universality of all human rights and their equal and impartial application to all States, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 60/251. The universal periodic review is aimed at overcoming some of the criticisms addressed to the Council's predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights, in terms of politicization and narrow focus, and further enhancing the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity. The experience in dealing with the first 32 countries under the universal periodic review process was largely considered successful.

4. While the newly established Human Rights Council Branch of OHCHR provided core support to the Council and its mechanisms, innovative working methods throughout the Office were designed to stimulate and encourage active engagement by all OHCHR branches and divisions, especially in the universal periodic review process. In doing so, OHCHR worked in a flexible, integrated and output-oriented manner. The work undertaken by the Office for compilations of information contained in the reports of treaty bodies, special procedures and other relevant United Nations documents, the preparation of the stakeholders' summaries and the substantive and logistical assistance provided to the "troikas" established pursuant to Council resolution 5/1 were also widely appreciated by member States and other stakeholders. The active participation and involvement of civil society and other stakeholders at various stages of the universal periodic review process was also particularly welcome.

5. OHCHR will assist the Council in carrying out an assessment of the overall impact of the universal periodic review mechanism in line with the relevant provisions of resolution 5/1. Although the final conclusions will be reached at the end of the four-year universal periodic review cycle, it is already possible to anticipate some of the fine-tuning measures that may be contemplated. In particular, the universal periodic review could benefit from some form of independent expertise being instilled in the process in order for it to evolve into an implementation-oriented mechanism with targeted and prioritized recommendations to be addressed to the States under review.

6. Progress was also made in consolidating the Council's other mechanisms. The members of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, elected at the main session of the Council, met for the first time in August 2008. In opening the first session of this new body, the Acting High Commissioner encouraged them to draw lessons from the challenges and difficulties faced by the Subcommission, but also to build on its strengths and achievements, with a view to enhancing the human rights system at large. At the same time, it should be recognized that the establishment of the Advisory Committee constitutes an opportunity to chart a new path and develop innovative working methods with a view to ensuring that it becomes an effective and efficient think tank providing expert advice to assist the Council.

7. Additionally, OHCHR provides significant support to the new mechanisms established by the Council, which replaced subsidiary bodies of the former Subcommission, namely, the Social Forum, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Forum on Minority Issues.

8. Finally, OHCHR gave its full support to other initiatives of the Council, including its first thematic special session, on the global food crisis, and a number of panels and general discussions on a variety of issues. These new tools and forums helped to steward the discussion at the international level on issues that otherwise might not receive the needed focus in the Council.

Chapter III
Strengthening country engagement

9. In line with the OHCHR plan of action, country engagement remained at the core of the Office's work throughout the reporting period. In addition to the further rationalization and consolidation of existing human rights field presences, OHCHR strengthened partnerships with national counterparts (Governments and civil society), within the United Nations system and with humanitarian actors and regional organizations. OHCHR headquarters capacity to support country engagement was increased significantly during the reporting period. In particular, its rapid response capacity developed considerably, allowing the Office to initiate and support emergency and technical missions. Support for national human rights institutions was also reinforced.

A. Presence of the Office of the High Commissioner at the country and regional levels

10. As of August 2008, OHCHR was running and supporting a total of 53 field presences, including 9 regional presences, 7 country offices (as well as offices in Kosovo and the occupied Palestinian territory), human rights components in 17 United Nations peace missions and human rights advisers in 16 United Nations country teams.

11. Since the submission of the High Commissioner's previous report to the General Assembly, the following developments can be reported with regard to the OHCHR field offices:

(a) Standard agreements on the establishment of OHCHR country offices were renewed with the Governments of Colombia (September 2007) and Togo (July 2008), and a new standard agreement was signed with the Government of Mexico (February 2008). The OHCHR memorandum of understanding with the Royal Government of Cambodia was renewed in November 2007. That agreement, extending the mandate of OHCHR in Cambodia for 18 months, was reached on the understanding that negotiations aimed at concluding a standard agreement for future operations of the office would resume in 2008. In September 2008, OHCHR will renew its agreement with the Government of Guatemala. The Office hopes to renew its agreement with the Government of Uganda, with which it has been working constructively for several years through its country office. A disappointing development was the discontinuation, in May 2008, of the OHCHR presence in Angola after the authorities declined to sign a comprehensive agreement for human rights promotion and protection activities;

(b) The Regional Office for West Africa was established in January 2008 further to the signature of an agreement with the Government of Senegal in December 2007. In May 2008, OHCHR signed an agreement with the Government of Kyrgyzstan for the opening of a Regional Office for Central Asia. Negotiations are ongoing with the Government of Qatar regarding the establishment of a human rights training and documentation centre for South-West Asia and the Arab region, as foreseen in General Assembly resolution 60/153, and OHCHR continues to seek host countries for the establishment of regional offices in North Africa and in South-West Asia.

B. Headquarters capacity to support country engagement

Rapid-response capacity

12. At the headquarters level, the capacity of OHCHR to react promptly to critical human rights situations continued to develop through its Peace Missions Support and Rapid Response Unit. This enabled action and the provision of conceptual and operational support in respect of a number of unforeseen human rights situations, including the implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions and decisions. With this increased capacity, OHCHR undertook an increased number of initiatives, including monitoring parliamentary elections in Togo in October 2007 and deploying a fact-finding mission to Kenya in February 2008 to look into allegations of grave human rights violations following the December 2007 elections. A rapid-response mission was also deployed in March 2008 to Armenia to provide advice to the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the wake of violent clashes in the aftermath of the presidential elections. In June 2008, OHCHR provided support to the OHCHR country office in Bolivia to monitor the human rights situation in the context of regional referendums. That same month, OHCHR conducted a technical assessment mission on the human rights situation in Somalia.

13. The Rapid Response Unit also supported the implementation of resolutions and decisions of the Human Rights Council, such as the dispatch of the High-Level Fact-Finding Mission to Beit Hanoun in May 2008. It also continued to support the High-Level Mission and the Group of Experts mandated by the Council to assess the situation of human rights in Darfur until the latter's mandate was discontinued in December 2007. Support was also provided to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, who conducted the first country visit since 2003 following a special session of the Human Rights Council on Myanmar in October 2007.

Support for national human rights institutions

14. Another headquarters-based function of OHCHR that has a significant impact in the field is support for national human rights institutions. On a continuing basis, OHCHR provides advice to some 100 such institutions worldwide, in collaboration with its field offices as well as peace missions and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). During the reporting period, OHCHR provided technical advice on the establishment and responsibilities of national human rights institutions to a number of States: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, France, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mauritius, Palau, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Uganda. In its work on and with national human rights institutions, OHCHR continued to cooperate closely with regional networks of such institutions.

15. Furthermore, OHCHR continued to provide secretarial support to the meetings of the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions. OHCHR is also increasingly supporting and facilitating interaction between national human rights institutions and international human rights mechanisms. In early 2008, OHCHR started a fellowship programme for staff of "A" status national human rights institutions to work in its National

Institutions Unit for a period of six months, so that they could gain knowledge of and experience with the United Nations human rights system.

C. Partnerships

Peace missions

16. OHCHR stepped up its cooperation with Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs peace missions and other relevant counterparts to ensure further implementation of the Secretary-General's decision on human rights in integrated missions, adopted in October 2005. Significant progress was achieved in this respect, including increased public human rights reporting. In July 2008, OHCHR, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs issued a joint policy directive for public reporting by human rights components of peace operations to improve this key aspect of human rights work.

17. OHCHR participated in technical assessment missions and other significant mission planning activities led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs during the reporting period. It thus contributed to setting up human rights components within the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad, established at those countries' borders with Darfur. OHCHR also participated in the restructuring of the human rights components of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone and in the strengthening of the human rights capacity of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia.

18. OHCHR continued to participate in the development of policies and guidance to strengthen the integration of human rights in peace operations work, as well as in training and induction courses for senior management of peace operations. It has collaborated with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the development of training materials for United Nations military, police and formed police units, and civilian personnel. An electronic resource centre for staff of peace operations, containing more than 300 human rights guidance and reference materials, was launched in June 2008.

Humanitarian actors

19. OHCHR intensified its involvement with the work of the humanitarian community, particularly through the Geneva-based inter-agency humanitarian forums. OHCHR is the Chair of the Reference Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Action of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which facilitates the integration of a human rights-based approach in humanitarian activities. OHCHR continues to contribute actively to the mainstreaming of human rights in humanitarian programming, mainly through the protection cluster, which it is co-leading, and the work on the protection capacity programme. OHCHR has also been actively involved in the work of the global protection cluster, providing support and information to human rights field presences.

United Nations resident coordinator system

20. Mainstreaming human rights in the work of the United Nations system at the country level remains a priority for OHCHR, and, to this end, efforts to further strengthen cooperation with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams continued. During the reporting period this included, at the request of resident coordinators, the deployment of additional human rights advisers to the Russian Federation, Rwanda, Papua New Guinea, Guinea, Kenya, the Niger and, most recently, Moldova. By 2008, 47 United Nations country teams were receiving support under the Action 2 inter-agency programme chaired by OHCHR, aimed at building capacity and developing joint programmes to strengthen national protection systems.

21. OHCHR has contributed to system-wide efforts to strengthen the resident coordinator system by supporting new induction programmes for resident coordinators, agency country representatives and senior leaders, in partnership with the United Nations System Staff College and the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office. The High Commissioner and the Chair of the United Nations Development Group jointly convened a consultation with selected resident coordinators in April 2008 to discuss human rights challenges connected with United Nations operational activities at the country level. This led to the elaboration of a set of decisions from the Secretary-General on the integration of human rights in the work of United Nations country teams and resident coordinators.

22. The Office has also increased its engagement with other United Nations entities, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in the area of economic, social and cultural rights. Through close cooperation with each of those agencies, respectively, joint documents, publications and materials relating to the rights to health, food and housing were produced.

Regional organizations

23. Greater interaction with regional organizations was needed, particularly in engaging with countries where there is no OHCHR presence. The Office interacted extensively with the regional mechanisms of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union. Cooperation with regional institutions was also strengthened in the Latin America and Caribbean region, particularly with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, as well as in Africa, in particular with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In the Asia and Pacific region, OHCHR provides technical support in efforts to establish subregional human rights arrangements in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations area and the South Pacific. OHCHR also stepped up interaction with the Organization of Islamic States and the League of Arab States.

Chapter IV
Developments in strategic thematic areas

A. Equality and non-discrimination

24. The struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action remain key priorities for OHCHR. The Office continues to extend substantive and organizational support to the mechanisms established in the follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, namely, the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent and the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. The Office also provides support to the Ad Hoc Committee of the Human Rights Council on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards and five regional experts on complementary standards.

25. OHCHR also supports the preparatory process leading to the convening in 2009 of a review conference in Geneva on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/149. The Office assisted the work of the Preparatory Committee for the conference during its organizational and first substantive session. The second substantive session of the Preparatory Committee will be in Geneva in October 2008. OHCHR also assisted the intersessional open-ended intergovernmental working group and the informal Group of Friends of the Chair established by the Preparatory Committee.

B. Development, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals

26. OHCHR undertook various activities in the promotion of the implementation of the right to development, including through efforts to clarify linkages between that right and global partnerships for development, as well as research and analytical work, expert meetings and workshops. With this in mind, the Office continued building partnerships with relevant stakeholders, along with advocacy work on the right to development, aid effectiveness and related subjects.

27. Consistent support for the initiative of the Human Rights Council was maintained with a view to developing a draft set of guiding principles on the rights of persons living in extreme poverty. OHCHR has also continued its substantive support for the work of the social forum on issues concerning poverty and the social dimensions of the globalization process.

28. The new OHCHR publication *Claiming the Millennium Development Goals: A Human Rights Approach* was distributed widely to United Nations country teams. The Office organized an expert consultation on 16 and 17 June 2008 on strengthening assessment frameworks for the Millennium Development Goals from a human rights perspective. In order to ensure that OHCHR contributions in this field are fully informed by national perspectives and responsive to national priorities and demands, OHCHR, in collaboration with the United Nations

Children's Fund and other partners, embarked on a series of technical analyses and policy dialogues in 2008 called "dialogues for action".

29. OHCHR continued to enhance inter-agency collaboration and coherence in the area of human rights and development, particularly in the context of the Action 2 programme. On the basis of the common learning package on a human rights-based approach developed through inter-agency efforts in 2007, the Action 2 programme, in cooperation with the United Nations System Staff College, enhanced support for United Nations country teams in integrating human rights in United Nations common country programming, expanding the pool of qualified agency resource persons.

30. OHCHR has played a key role in advocating for the need to provide adequate protection to people living with and affected by HIV. Together with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and its sponsors, OHCHR has been working on the implementation of a human rights-based approach to HIV at the country level in order to reduce vulnerability to AIDS. A handbook on HIV/AIDS and national human rights institutions, aimed at encouraging such institutions to play a stronger role in advocacy and monitoring the effectiveness of national responses, was finalized in 2008.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

31. On 18 June 2008 the Human Rights Council took an important step towards strengthening the protection of economic, social and cultural rights by adopting the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and recommending its adoption by the General Assembly. The Protocol, which establishes a procedure of individual communications for cases of alleged violations of economic, social and cultural rights, is an important milestone underlining the equal value of all human rights and the relevance of legal remedies for the protection of those rights. The Protocol was negotiated by an open-ended working group of the Human Rights Council serviced by OHCHR. As part of its support for this process, OHCHR organized, in conjunction with the Government of Egypt, an African regional consultation meeting on the Optional Protocol, held in Cairo on 9 and 10 January 2008.

32. As part of a series of reports aimed at providing leadership and advocacy in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, the annual report of OHCHR to the Economic and Social Council in 2008 (E/2008/76) considered the principles of equality between men and women and non-discrimination against women as being paramount for the promotion and implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. By way of illustration, the report addresses the relevance of women's economic, social and cultural rights in the context of post-conflict reconstruction and democratization policies.

33. In a joint effort to promote the right to health, OHCHR and WHO have published a fact sheet (No. 31), made available in July 2008. Additionally, OHCHR is finalizing three other fact sheets on economic, social and cultural rights.

D. Indigenous peoples

34. OHCHR continues to give priority to its involvement with the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues and implement its four linguistic fellowship programmes for indigenous representatives. A two-year programme of work to promote implementation of the rights recognized in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was launched in 2008, with particular attention to the Africa region.

35. Since the adoption of the Declaration by the General Assembly in September 2007, the Office has organized a meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group to consider how to integrate the Declaration into programmes and operational activities at the national level. A communication strategy aimed at disseminating the Declaration was developed through the production of a pocket-sized version of the Declaration and a publication of frequently asked questions on the Declaration for the general reader. The Office is also preparing a manual on the Declaration giving reader-friendly explanations of each of its provisions.

36. The Human Rights Council has established the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as an advisory body focusing mainly on research-based expertise and studies. The first session of the Expert Mechanism will be held from 1 to 3 October 2008.

37. The General Assembly requested OHCHR to cooperate with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in relation to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (see A/60/270). The focus in 2008 will be to introduce the Declaration and encourage its use in reviewing and promoting human rights in the region. The Office will provide a briefing on the Declaration to the African Commission at its next session, in November 2008. On 18 and 19 August 2008, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Congo, with the support of OHCHR, will organize a workshop with parliamentarians to facilitate the passing of a law to promote and protect the rights of the indigenous populations. If the law is passed by the parliament it will be the first legislation in Africa specifically aimed at protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and reflecting the standards adopted by the General Assembly.

E. Minorities

38. There remain significant challenges to ensuring that minority concerns are integrated into efforts of the United Nations to reduce poverty, promote stable and socially inclusive societies and address systematic and long-standing discrimination against specific minority communities. OHCHR is contributing to meeting these challenges through a strategy focused on building thematic expertise, empowering rights-holders and mainstreaming minority issues throughout the United Nations system. The Office is currently finalizing its "guidelines and good practice for policing with diversity" in order to provide practical guidance and examples of good practices to assist Governments, United Nations officials, non-governmental organizations and others in ensuring that agencies of the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies are representative of, responsive to and accountable to the community as a whole. This tool has been prepared and validated through an expert seminar involving senior professionals from the police services of different regions

and countries of the world, United Nations and other intergovernmental organization partners and civil society. The Minority Fellowship Programme, which provides intensive human rights training, now has two linguistic components — English and Arabic — and 34 fellows from all regions of the world have participated in it since its inception in 2005. A first-ever human rights training event for representatives from Romani communities in various Latin American countries was held from 25 to 29 September 2007 in Buenos Aires.

39. Within the past year, the Office's country engagement on minority issues has concentrated on the Afro-descendant community in three Andean countries (Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru). At the inter-agency level, the Office has organized a number of consultations with United Nations agencies and programmes to exchange information on developments and activities relating to minorities in the United Nations system and to discuss ways of strengthening the implementation of article 9 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which calls for specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system to contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth in the Declaration. An information note on minorities, answering commonly asked questions and identifying possible elements that should be included in strategies to address the situation of minorities in United Nations field presences, has been prepared. The Office has also engaged in bilateral inter-agency cooperation, such as in the preparation of the UNDP resource guide on minorities.

F. Migration and trafficking

40. The complex dimensions of human trafficking, including its connections with migration, development, the protection and empowerment of trafficked persons, access to justice and prevention, have been the focus of the anti-trafficking programme of the Office over the past year. OHCHR has sought to promote and support a human rights-based approach to the trafficking of persons. In developing its approach, OHCHR has focused on elaborating a series of tools that can be used by States, intergovernmental organizations, human rights bodies, non-governmental organizations and individuals to further the goal of preventing trafficking and protecting the rights of victims. The foundation for this work has been the Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking, developed by OHCHR in 2002. This instrument is set to be considerably strengthened by the forthcoming release of a detailed commentary that provides a comprehensive legal and policy analysis of the Principles and Guidelines, as well as an implementation guide for the Recommended Principles and Guidelines, which OHCHR is developing in the context of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT).

41. OHCHR is a member of the Steering Committee of UN.GIFT, together with the International Organization for Migration, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and OSCE. Launched in 2007, this is the first global attempt to mobilize efforts within the United Nations system and in the international community to combat trafficking. UN.GIFT partners came together in February 2008 to convene the Vienna Forum to Fight Trafficking, which gathered over 1,500 participants from Member States, civil society, academia, the arts, media and the private sector to

discuss new strategies to combat human trafficking. OHCHR is also a partner of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons, led by the Special Representative and Coordinator of OSCE for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and continues to coordinate the Intergovernmental Contact Group on Human Trafficking and Migrants.

G. Rule of law and democracy

42. OHCHR continues to lead the United Nations system in advocacy, training and education on international human rights law, transitional justice in post-conflict societies, and monitoring and integrating human rights during post-conflict and development phases. In November 2007, the first meeting of the High Commissioner's Judicial Reference Group took place. The principal aim of bringing together this group of 14 senior judges from all regions was to provide the High Commissioner and OHCHR with a forum to discuss means for deepening the Office's engagement with national judiciaries on human rights issues. In order to frame the discussion, the meeting included a consideration of the human rights aspects of detention, in particular pretrial detention. OHCHR has also continued to support national judiciaries, in particular through in-country training, as well as training in Geneva.

43. OHCHR has continued the initiative of filing briefs by way of amicus curiae in national courts, such as the United States Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of Cambodia. In those briefs, the High Commissioner presented her analysis of international human rights norms relevant to the proceedings before the Court.

44. OHCHR has interacted with a number of States that have sought its assistance on projects involving either the establishment of a new constitution or a reform of elements of an existing constitution. In this respect, OHCHR has provided advice on the possible content of such proposed constitutional provisions so that they will correspond to international human rights standards, not only for civil and political rights but also for economic, social and cultural rights, as well as comments with regard to the institutions that are to be created to implement those constitutional provisions in practice.

45. OHCHR continues the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and plan of action. It is an active participant in the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force established by the Secretary-General and leads its working group on protecting human rights while countering terrorism. OHCHR issued its fact sheet No. 32, entitled "Human rights, terrorism and counter-terrorism", in July 2008.

46. With regard to transitional justice, OHCHR continues to support the development of minimum standards, good practices, lessons learned, methodology and guidance, training, capacity-building and coordination and collaboration with United Nations and non-United Nations actors. In 2008, it published the second series of transitional justice tools, containing best practices and lessons learned from field operations with regard to the topics "Maximizing the legacy of hybrid courts" and "Reparations programmes". OHCHR also convened a regional expert workshop in Cambodia to promote the operational use of existing tools and standards and to take stake stock of transitional justice activities and further needs in the region. Another expert workshop will be convened in Africa in October 2008.

47. The protection of witnesses to serious human rights violations and international crimes has been a great concern for OHCHR and the wider human rights community. In March 2008, OHCHR convened an expert meeting with a variety of United Nations and intergovernmental agencies. The meeting specifically addressed gaps and strategies for witness protection programmes, in particular those that are crucial for high-level investigations and trials involving serious human rights violations and international crimes.

H. Global Compact and human rights responsibilities of business

48. OHCHR continues its active engagement in the United Nations Global Compact. It participates in the work of the Human Rights Working Group and the Inter-Agency Team of the Global Compact. In addition, OHCHR continues to provide support for the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises.

I. Human rights education and training

49. OHCHR has continued to promote and assist the national implementation of the plan of action (2005-2009) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) and to coordinate related international efforts. The Office has made available on its website information on existing country initiatives and contacts, is collecting and disseminating good practices and is responding daily to relevant queries and requests for information. Several OHCHR resources are available to support the work of national and other stakeholders, such as a database and a collection of resources on human rights education and training. The work of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee on Human Rights Education in the School System, which has met three times since June 2007, was facilitated by the Office.

J. Climate change and human rights

50. On 28 March 2008 the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus its resolution 7/23, entitled "Human rights and climate change". In that resolution the Council expressed concern that climate change posed an immediate threat to people and communities and requested OHCHR to conduct an analytical study on the relationship between climate change and human rights, taking into account the views of States and other relevant international organizations and stakeholders. OHCHR has commenced work on the study and is reaching out to partners to seek information. The study will be considered by the Council at its tenth session, in March 2009, and, together with a summary of the Council's debate, will be made available to the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

K. Women's rights and gender work

51. OHCHR has initiated cooperation with a range of United Nations partners in respect of women's rights and gender issues. Colombia and Nepal have been identified as priority countries for the development of integrated country gender strategies. In the Sudan, OHCHR is assisting in the implementation of the recommendation on violence against women of the Expert Group on Darfur, through a series of activities and training events to be undertaken in different parts of the country. OHCHR is also involved in the elaboration of a pilot project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to increase access to justice for survivors of sexual violence.

52. OHCHR continues to play a major role in providing guidance and assistance to both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to facilitate the integration of women's rights and a gender perspective into the work of the Human Rights Council. It has facilitated three interactive expert discussion panels during the Council's first two years, and a side panel on discriminatory laws.

53. OHCHR also works on the protection of the rights of specific groups discriminated against on the basis of gender and on non-discrimination in the administration of justice. The Office has commissioned three legal studies in connection with those themes (on current jurisprudence relating to the prosecution of rape; on interlinkages between access to justice and the protection of women's economic, social and cultural rights; and on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity), which will form the basis for the development of legal positions and of the High Commissioner's advocacy strategy.

Chapter V
Human rights treaties and treaty body reform

A. Entry into force of the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

54. To mark the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol on 3 May 2008, OHCHR, together with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized a public event in the General Assembly, open to all members of the international community. On 6 June 2008, OHCHR supported the President of the Human Rights Council in organizing a special event to celebrate the entry into force of the Convention and the Optional Protocol. As at 29 July 2008, there were 32 States parties to the Convention and 19 to the Optional Protocol.

55. OHCHR has also continued to raise awareness of the Convention, to encourage States to ratify it and to assist States upon request, as well as national human rights institutions and civil society, in the process of implementation and, eventually, monitoring of the Convention. In collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, OHCHR published the *Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. OHCHR co-chaired the first meeting of the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention and hosted the second one in Geneva on 19 and 20 June 2008. To follow up on the High Commissioner's commitment to decent work for staff with disabilities, made on 3 December 2007, the Office completed an accessibility audit of its premises, facilities and technology in June 2008.

56. OHCHR has also been working with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Office of Legal Affairs to prepare for the election of the members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will take place during the first meeting of the Conference of States Parties, on 3 November 2008. After its establishment, OHCHR will provide secretariat support to the new Committee, which is expected to meet for the first time in early 2009.

B. Treaty body reform

57. In 2008, OHCHR has continued to organize and participate in consultations on all proposals relating to the reform and the streamlining of the work of the human rights treaty bodies. Emphasis has been placed on simplification of the reporting procedures of the treaty bodies and harmonization of their working methods. In June 2008, the seventh inter-committee meeting and the twentieth meeting of Chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies noted that there had been progress with the use of the consolidated guidelines for the common core document by States parties.

58. Over the past year, the human rights treaty bodies have made further progress with the harmonization of their treaty-specific guidelines, and three — the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Migrant Workers and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women — have adopted treaty-specific guidelines to complement those in the common core document. The seventh inter-committee meeting urged treaty bodies

to complete the adoption of treaty-specific reporting guidelines by the end of 2009. Many States parties have received training on the common core document, and others have expressed interest in receiving such training. A number of common core documents and treaty-specific reports have been received since the last report.

59. The seventh inter-committee meeting also decided to dedicate one of its two 2008 meetings exclusively to the improvement and harmonization of working methods of the human rights treaty bodies. It also decided that the agenda for the eighth meeting would include a substantive discussion of the revised treaty-specific guidelines, of follow-up to concluding observations, of the consideration of country situations in the absence of a report and of the link between recommendations and outputs of treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council's universal periodic review mechanism. Another important recommendation was the establishment of a working group on harmonization and/or identification of best practices in respect of follow-up, due to report back to the ninth inter-committee meeting, to be held in 2009.

Chapter VI
Support for special procedures

60. The system of the special procedures has undergone changes since June 2006, when the Human Rights Council embarked on a review, rationalization, and improvement exercise in respect of all mechanisms established by the former Commission on Human Rights. On 18 June 2007 the Council adopted two resolutions: resolution 5/1, on institution-building, and resolution 5/2, on the Code of Conduct for Special Procedures Mandate-holders. In those resolutions the Council reaffirmed the importance and independence of special procedures and established new procedures for the selection and appointment of mandate-holders, set out principles for the review, rationalization and improvement of individual mandates and set out elements to guide mandate-holders in discharging their functions.

61. As a result of the review, rationalization, and improvement exercise, carried out at the last three sessions of the Human Rights Council and due to conclude in September 2008, all existing thematic mandates have been extended, one country mandate has been terminated and two new thematic mandates have been established (namely, those of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, and the Special Rapporteur on the right to access to safe drinking water and sanitation). The review, rationalization, and improvement exercise has reaffirmed the standing of the special procedures before the Human Rights Council, and the new selection procedure was designed to uphold the highest standards of competence and integrity among mandate-holders.

62. The Code of Conduct for Special Procedures Mandate-holders is an important accountability and guidance tool. It is complemented by the internal advisory procedure adopted by mandate-holders as a self-regulatory mechanism whose aim is to ensure that the Code of Conduct and the Manual of the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures are adequately implemented.

63. In addition to its regular yearly programme in support of human rights activities of special procedures — consisting of over 50 country visits, more than 1,000 communications to Governments concerning alleged human rights violations and more than 100 reports to the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly, OHCHR has provided indispensable support for the Council's selection of 23 new mandate-holders. It has also ensured a smooth transition between outgoing and incoming special rapporteurs, independent experts and members of working groups by organizing briefings and an information session for new mandate-holders. The Office's assistance to the Coordination Committee — which has been recognized in a Human Rights Council presidential statement as a body representing all mandate-holders — has allowed the Committee to expand its engagement and advocacy with the Council on behalf of mandate-holders, support the integration of new mandate-holders into the system and finalize the Manual of the United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures, which was adopted by the 15th annual meeting of mandate-holders, thus concluding a two-year revision process.

Chapter VII
Conclusion

64. Through its wide range of activities, OHCHR continues to support Member States in meeting their human rights obligations, while empowering rights-holders, in particular through active country engagements and work with national partners, civil society and United Nations country teams. Properly supporting the strengthening of the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies and the special procedures, as well as national protection systems, will remain priorities for OHCHR. All Member States are called upon to continue to support and complement the Office's efforts in these areas, with a view to better preparing to meet the human rights challenges ahead.

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